

Surah Al-Lahab

(The Flame)

This Surah is Makki, and it has 5 verses

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

With the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful

Verses 1 - 5

تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ ۝ مَا أَغْنَى عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ ۝
 سَيَصْلُى نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ ۝ وَامْرَأَهُ طَ حَمَّالَةُ الْحَطَبِ ۝ فِي
 جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِنْ مَسَدٍ ۝

Perish the two hands of Abū Lahab, and perish he! [1]
 Neither his wealth availed him, nor what he earned. [2]
 He will soon enter a fire, full of flames, [3] and his wife
 as well, the wicked¹ carrier of firewood. [4] In her neck
 there is a rope of twisted palm-fibre. [5]

Name and Nickname of Abū Lahab

Abū Lahab [Father of Flame] was the Nickname of 'Abd-ul-'Uzzā, one of the sons of 'Abdul-Muṭṭalib. As he was ruddy in complexion, he was nicknamed Abū Lahab [Father of Flame]. The Qur'an did not mention his real name, because it smacked of paganism, and the last element 'lahab' [Flame] in the nickname has also nexus with the flame of Hell. This person was the inveterate enemy and persecutor of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and violently opposed Islam. Whenever the Holy Prophet ﷺ invited the people to Islamic Faith, he would stand up and cry lie to his message. [Ibn

(1) The word 'wicked' is though not available in the text in express terms, the *naṣb* on *ḥammālah*, which is termed in Arabic grammar as '*naṣb 'aladhdh-dhāmm*' carries this meaning. (Muhammad Taqi Usmani)

Kathīr]

Cause of Revelation

It is recorded in the two Ṣaḥīḥs that when the verse وَأَنذِرْ عَشَيْرَتَكَ الْأَقْرَبِينَ (Warn your closest relatives - 26:214) was revealed, the Holy Prophet ﷺ ascended the mount Ṣafā and cried out to the tribe of Quraish in a manner that was known among them for warning of an attack by the enemy. Some narratives maintain that he called the different Makkan clans by name, the clan of Banū 'Abd Munāf, Banū 'Abdul-Muṭṭalib and others. All the clans of Quraish gathered around him, and he said to them: 'If I were to tell you that the enemy is about to attack you in the morning or in the evening, would you believe me?' They all unanimously replied in the affirmative. Then he said: 'Verily, I am a warner sent to you before the coming of a severe torment (as a result of disbelief or paganism). Abū Lahab then responded: تَبَّأْ لَكَ الْهَدَا جَمِيعًا 'Ruin may seize you ! Is it for this purpose that you have called us together?' and picked up a stone to hit him. Thus this Sūrah was revealed.

Verse [111:1] تَبَّأْ لَكَ الْهَدَا وَتَبَّ (Perish the two hands of Abū Lahab, and perish he!) The word *yad* literally means a 'hand'. Because hands play a very important role in all of human works and actions, often *yad* (hand) refers to the human person, as in the phrase ذَلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمْتَ يَدَكَ (...All this is due to what your hands have sent forth...22:10). Baihaqī has recorded on the authority of Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbas رضي الله عنه that one day Abū Lahab said to the people that Muḥammad ﷺ says that such-and-such a thing will happen after death. Then, pointing to his hands, said that none of those things have come into these hands; then he addressed his hands and said: تَبَّ لَكُمَا مَا أَرَى فِي كَمَا شَيْئاً مَا قَالَ مُحَمَّدٌ (Perish you! I do not see any of the things Muḥammad ﷺ said in you.) Therefore, the Qur'an attributes his destruction to his hands.

The verb *tabba* is derived from *tabab* which means 'to perish'. In verse [1], the first sentence تَبَّ لَكَ الْهَدَا (Perish the two hands of Abū Lahab) is in the form of a prayer invoking or imprecating destruction upon Abū Lahab, and the second sentence *wa tabba* is the declarative sentence prophesying the consequence of the invocation. The first sentence was invoked against him to satisfy the indignation of the Muslims, because when Abū Lahab imprecated destruction upon the Holy Prophet ﷺ, it was the desire of the Muslims that imprecation be invoked against him.

Allah thus fulfilled their desire, and also informed them that the invocation has taken effect and he perished. Seven days after the battle of Badr, he developed a terrible case of plague because of which people avoided him. They regarded the disease as infectious and were afraid that it might be transmitted by contact, so they forced him to live in an isolated house, and they did not come into contact with him at all. He at last died in this state. His dead body lay untouched in his house for three days. When his body began to rot giving out unbearable stench, people taunted his sons, and they hired laborers to take it away and bury it. They dug a pit in the ground, pushed his body into it with a stick and covered it with stones. [Bayān-ul-Qurān from Rūh].

Verse [111:2] (مَا أَغْنَى عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ) (Neither his wealth availed him, nor what he earned.) The phrase *mā kasab* [what he earned] could refer to the profits that accrued to him from investment of his wealth in business, and it could also imply 'children', for the children of a person are also referred to (in Arabic) as his earning. Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَنْهَا reports that the Messenger of Allah said:

ان اطيب ما اكل الرجل من كسبه وان ولده من كسبه

"The best and the purest thing a man eats is from his earnings and his children are part of his earnings".

This means that eating from the earnings of one's children is tantamount to eating from one's own earnings. [Qurṭubī]

Therefore, Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَنْهَا, Mujāhid, 'Atā', Ibn Sirīn and others interpret *mā kasab* [what he earned] as referring to 'children'. Allah had granted Abū Lahab abundant wealth and many children, and these two factors led him to be ungrateful, and caused him to be proud and arrogant. Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رَضِيَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَنْهُ says that when the Messenger of Allah ﷺ called his people to faith and warned them about the Divine punishment, Abū Lahab said: "Even if what my nephew says is true, I will save myself from the painful torment on the Day of Judgement with my wealth and my children." Thus Allah revealed verse [2] (مَا أَغْنَى عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ), that is, when the Divine torment seized him in this world, neither his wealth nor his children benefited him!

Verse [111:3] (سَيَصْلِي تَارِيَاتَ لَهُبٍ) (He will enter a fire, full of flames.) That is, either on the Day of Judgment or immediately after his death, while in

grave, he will be pushed into the blazing fire. There is a rhetorical relationship between Abū Lahab and *dhāta lahab* [full of flames].

The Fate of Umm Jamīl, the Wife of Abū Lahab

Verse [111:4] (وَامْرَأَهُ، حَمَّالَةُ الْحَطَبِ) (And his wife as well, the wicked, the carrier of firewood.) As Abū Lahab was a vehement enemy of the Holy Messenger ﷺ, his wife too was supportive of her husband in his disbelief, rejection, obstinacy, and in persecuting the Holy Prophet ﷺ. She was a sister of Abū Sufyān, and daughter of Harb Ibn 'Umayyah. Her nickname was Umm Jamīl. The Qur'an makes plain in this verse that this wretched woman will also roast with her husband in the fire of Hell. She is described as حَمَّالَةُ الْحَطَبِ which literally means 'the carrier of firewood'. Idiomatically, Arabs use this expression to refer to a 'tale-bearer', that is, one who gathers pieces of gossip and carries them between individuals and families in order to ignite the fires of discord and enmity between people, exactly as one would gather firewood to kindle the fire. This telltale woman improperly carried information concerning the private affairs of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and the blessed Companions in an attempt to ignite and instigate trouble. In this verse too, the phrase 'the carrier of firewood' has been interpreted by Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās ﷺ, Mujāhid, Ikrimah رَحْمَهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى and a group of commentators to mean that 'She was a tale-bearer' while Ibn Zaid, Dāhḥāk and other commentators رَحْمَهُمُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى retain it in its original sense, and explain that she literally used to collect thorny branches from the jungle, and place them in the path of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in order to harm him - hence the description: 'carrier of firewood'. [Qurtubī, Ibn Kathīr].

Some scholars explain that just as she used to help her husband in this world to promote disbelief and tyranny and to assist him in harming the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, she will add to the torment of her husband in the Hereafter. She will collect the branches of *zaqqūm* and other trees and add them as fuel to the fire of Hell in which her husband would be roasting. [Ibn Kathīr].

Tale-Bearing: A Gravely Major Sin

It is recorded in the two *Šahīhs* that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is reported to have said that a tale-bearer (to harm others) will not enter Paradise. Fudail Ibn 'Iyād رَحْمَهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى says that there are three evil deeds of man that destroy all his righteous actions . They are: [1] backbiting; [2]

tale-bearing; and [3] lying. 'Atā' Ibn Sā'ib رحمه الله تعالى says that he asked Sha'bī رحمه الله تعالى about the Prophetic Tradition in which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is reported to have said: لا يدخل الجنة سافك دم ولا مثاء بنعمة ولا تاجر يربى "Three types of people will not enter Paradise: [1] a murderer; [2] a tale-bearer; and [3] a trader who is involved in usury." 'Atā' رحمه الله تعالى says that I cited this Tradition to Sha'bī and asked him in a surprising tone that the Holy Prophet ﷺ has equated 'a tale-bearer' with a murderer and a usurer. He replied: "Indeed, tale-bearing is the root cause of murder and usurpation of wealth." [Qurtubi]

Verse [111:5] فِي جَيْدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِّنْ مَسَدٍ (In her neck there is a rope of twisted palm-fibre.) The *masd* with the letter-s-bearing *sukūn* [quiescence or rest] is an infinitive which means 'to twist rope or cord, or to twist it strongly and tightly'. If the word is read as *māsād* with the letters *m-s* bearing *fathā* [= a-a], the word refers to fibres. It is also a rope made of 'twisted fibres of palm tree' or 'tightly braided fibres of coconut tree' or 'cord that has been woven strongly' or 'coil or cable formed by winding iron strands together'. [al-Qāmūs]. Some scholars have preferred to translate it specifically as 'a rope made of twisted fibres of palm tree' and no other string or twine. This is in conformity with the general usage of the Arabs. Basically, it refers to any string or twine or rope or cord or coil or cable formed by intertwining strands of any material. In keeping with this general sense of the word, Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رض, 'Urwah Ibn Zubair رض and others said that in this context the phrase حَبْلٌ مِّنْ مَسَدٍ "rope of masad" refers to 'rope formed by twisting iron strands'. This will be her condition in Hell where an iron-collar will be in her neck. Sayyidnā Mujāhid رض interprets *min masad* as *min ḥadīd*, that is, 'of iron'. [Mazhari].

Sha'bi, Muqātil and other commentators have taken the phrase *min masad* to refer to 'a rope made of twisted fibres of palm tree' and said that Abū Lahab and his wife were extremely wealthy and were looked upon as leaders of their nation but, on account of his wife's mean disposition and miserliness, she used to collect firewood from the jungle, bind them together with a rope, place the bundle on her head and put its rope round her neck, so that it might not fall from her head. This practice of hers one day led to her destruction. She had a bundle of wood on her head and the rope in her neck. She felt tired and sat down. Then fell, was choked and

died. According to this second interpretation, the verse describes her mean disposition and the disastrous consequences of her sadistic behavior. [Mazhari]. However, such a conduct in Abū Lahab's family, especially of his wife, was hardly conceivable; therefore, most commentators have preferred the first interpretation. Allah knows best!

Alhamdulillah
The Commentary on
Sūrah Al-Lahab
Ends here